



March 27, 2007

Ms. Song Her
Clerk to the Board
State Water Board
P.O. Box 100
Sacramento, CA 95812



RE: March 20, 2007 State Water Board Meeting Regarding a Potential Statewide Water Recycling Policy

Dear Ms. Her:

The California League of Food Processors (CLFP) has prepared comments regarding the development of a statewide water recycling policy by the State Water Board, a copy is enclosed. Please contact me if you have any questions about this submission.

Sincerely,

Rob Neenan
Director of Regulatory Affairs

CC: Ray Medeiros, Los Gatos Tomato Products

<p>CALIFORNIA LEAGUE OF FOOD PROCESSORS (CLFP) COMMENTS REGARDING THE POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF A STATEWIDE WATER RECYCLING POLICY</p>
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Background on the Fruit and Vegetable Processing Industry

There are about 230 fruit and vegetable processing facilities in California and they collectively process 16 – 18 million tons of commodities per year. The major commodities include canned, frozen, and dehydrated fruits and vegetables. Food processors purchase farm products grown on over 300,000 acres, providing an important market for hundreds of farmers across the state. The industry is one of the largest employers in Central California with over 220,000 workers, and is a major component of the economy of the San Joaquin Valley.

Water Recycling by Food Processors

Fruit and vegetable processors in California collectively use about 62,000 acre-feet of water per year to handle, clean, and prepare products, and to sanitize their facilities. About 60 percent of fruit and vegetable processors recycle their wastewater to irrigate crops, the other 40 percent send their wastewater to public treatment works. Due to the materials used in processing and the inherent salt content of some fruits and vegetables the wastewater can have relatively high concentrations of salt, nitrogen, and other constituents. However, if wastewater land application is managed carefully it will not degrade groundwater and can provide a valuable resource to farmers.

CLFP Manual of Good Practice

Water recycling is important to many food processors. To ensure that the wastewaters are properly managed and that the industry continues to practice good environmental stewardship, CLFP has recently completed a Manual of Good Practice for land application. The Manual was developed in conjunction with Central Valley Regional Water Board staff and other stakeholders. The document is a comprehensive technical guide that is based on the best available science. CLFP has conducted a training workshop regarding the Manual and will continue to work with processors to ensure that they implement best practices and take a proactive approach to site management. CLFP is also working to obtain federal funds to conduct research regarding salinity issues associated with land application.

The Importance of Water Reuse

Water reuse is not an option for California, it is a necessity. The state's population is projected to increase nearly 50 percent between 2005 and 2030, to about 52 million residents. This growth will require a substantial and dependable supply of water. New sources of water are likely to be limited due to ongoing political opposition to large scale water storage projects, the high cost of desalination, and reduced snow pack due to climate change. As a result, water reuse and conservation must be pursued vigorously to avoid an environmental and economic catastrophe in the decades ahead.

As noted in the 2003 report of the *Recycled Water Task Force*, California is currently recycling about 500,000 acre-feet of water per year for various uses, with the potential of increasing that amount to 1.5 million acre-feet per year by 2030. Recycled water could free up enough fresh water to meet the household demands of 30 to 50 percent of the 17 million additional California residents in 2050.

Recycling is very important to farmers. According to the State Water Board, over 240,000 acre-feet of water per year is reused for agricultural irrigation. This is an economically rational use of resources that preserves higher-quality waters for other environmental objectives or human activities.

Application of the Anti-Degradation Policy:

How the anti-degradation policy is applied by regulators will directly affect water recycling. State Water Board Resolution 68-16 establishes a two-step process to determine if any discharge that may degrade water quality will be allowed. The first step requires that the discharge:

1. Will benefit the people of the state
2. Will not unreasonably affect present and anticipated beneficial uses of the water
3. Will not result in water quality less than prescribed by water quality objectives

The second step is that the discharger is required to use the best practicable treatment or control (BPTC) necessary to avoid pollution and to maintain the highest water quality consistent with the maximum benefit of the people of the state. The application of this general requirement at any given site can be quite subjective.

CLFP believes that the determination of BPTC should be industry and/or site specific, based on proven and currently available technology, and take into consideration economic and secondary environmental factors. For example, reverse osmosis (RO) wastewater filtration technology is not a feasible BPTC for many food processing plant applications. The high organic loads in the wastewater tend to cause significant and expensive operational challenges. RO systems require large amount of energy, generating high costs and greenhouse gases. RO systems also generate significant amounts of concentrated brine that must be disposed, potentially creating other negative environmental affects. As a result of these factors other options must be considered for the food processing industry.

Recommendations for the State Water Board:

CLFP recommends the following action by the Board

1. The Board should pursue policies that encourage water recycling.
2. The anti-degradation policy should not be interpreted by regulators to effectively mean zero degradation, and the standards for BPTC should be based on proven science and sound economics.
3. Provide adequate funding for technical and economic research and demonstration projects related to water recycling. The State Board can help identify and develop

new technologies and practices that will foster recycling in a manner consistent with water quality policies and objectives.

4. Coordinate water recycling efforts with the ongoing activities of the Salinity Policy Working Group to ensure development of clear and consistent policies.

Water recycling is critical to California's future, and there are a number of key policy issues that will directly affect if, and how, food processors and the agricultural sector can continue to recycle water to produce food and fiber for the nation. CLFP looks forward to working with the State Board to discuss these issues further and how any proposed new policies might impact food processors.